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Viewing cable 06MANAGUA1960, TAKE TWO ON NICARAGUA ELECTIONS -- SCENARIOS,

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Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#06MANAGUA1960**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06MANAGUA1960	2006-09-06 22:32	2011-08-30 01:44	SECRET	Embassy Managua

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758456.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758467.aspx>
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DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CEN, WHA/USOAS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/06/2026
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [NU](#)
SUBJECT: TAKE TWO ON NICARAGUA ELECTIONS -- SCENARIOS,
RISKS, AND POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

REF: MANAGUA 0127

Classified By: Ambassador Paul A. Trivelli. Reasons 1.4 (B,D).

11. (S) SUMMARY: In January, post shared its assessment of Nicaragua's possible election scenarios, the risks entailed, and possible outcomes (Reftel). Since then, a fifth presidential candidate entered the race, and Herty Lewites passed away, replaced by Edmundo Jarquin. While approximately 70% of Nicaraguans reject Daniel Ortega, he could still win the November 5 election because a candidate can win with only 35% of the votes. While we expect Jarquin to shave off some traditionally Sandinista voters, the difference might not suffice to prevent a first-round Ortega victory. However, Ortega would likely lose a second round, except perhaps to Rizo. At this juncture, reuniting the PLC and ALN might well prove counterproductive. Further, if Rizo withdrew and actively campaigned for Montealegre, the ALN could lose more votes from the independents than it would gain from Rizo's support. The ideal scenario (i.e., the one most likely to prevent a first-round Ortega win) would be Rizo's resignation and his withdrawal from the political scene. Accomplishing this objective will require robust persuasion/dissuasion from Embassy and Washington, and in the end, our pressure might not be enough. END SUMMARY.

FIVE-WAY RACE IN THE CARDS
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12. (C) Since post's previous assessment in January, a fifth presidential candidate, Eden Pastora, entered the race, and Edmundo Jarquin replaced candidate Herty Lewites. Nonetheless, the race remains in essence a four-way contest, as Pastora is expected to draw no more than 3% of the vote. (Note: Interlocutors tell us that Pastora may be the "Trojan pony" for Ortega, asserting that many of AC voting table (JRV) members actually belong to the FSLN and that Pastora has struck a deal with Ortega to support him if on election day disputes arise at the JRVs, in exchange for ensuring Pastora's party gains a few Assembly seats.) Candidates in the race are the following:

- Liberal Constitutional Party (PLC) candidate Jose Rizo
- Sandinista (FSLN) candidate Daniel Ortega
- FSLN dissident Edmundo Jarquin (replacing Herty Lewites), now MRS.
- PLC dissident Eduardo Montealegre (now ALN-PC)
- AC Candidate Eden Pastora

BASIC PREMISES

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13. (C) The following are our current premises concerning Nicaragua's political landscape:

--Most Nicaraguans (polls indicate 65% to 70%) reject the current leadership of the Liberal Constitutional Party (PLC) and the Sandinista Party (FSLN). However, while early polls pegged dissident PLC candidate Eduardo Montealegre (ALN-PC) and dissident FSLN member Herty Lewites as the clear front-runners, since then, Ortega has pulled ahead in the polls and Lewites passed away in early July.

--While in previous presidential elections, voters had the binary option to vote for or against Ortega, this time voters must also chose between pro and anti-FSLN-PLC pact candidates, a political landscape that offers Nicaraguans a chance to choose a leader who will focus on strengthening Nicaragua's fragile democracy rather than consolidating personal power or the party's control over Nicaragua and its resources.

--Historically, Nicaragua's independent voters have determined the outcome of presidential elections, and in this election they will also play a crucial role. Current polls suggest that approximately 20% to 30% of the population is independent and/or undecided.

-- Given the possibility of a candidate's winning with 35% of the vote and a 5% margin over his closest competitor, Ortega -- who now polls around 30% -- could steal the remaining points required to win, unless his closest competitor, Eduardo Montealegre (currently trailing by an average margin

of seven points) narrows the margin between them. (Note: Since the post's previous cable, Ortega has gained in the polls and now ranks first (27% -31%), followed by Montealegre (21% - 28%). Rizo and Jarquin vie for third place (12%-17%) and Pastora trails far behind (1%-2%).

--Ortega is unlikely to win a runoff, except possibly against Rizo (Pastora is not expected to place second).

--The PLC will not reform and shift into the democratic, anti-caudillo column before the election largely because Aleman will not loosen his hold on the party apparatus and much of the PLC leadership remains beholden to him.

--Montealegre cannot afford to affiliate with the PLC as long as the PLC remains under Aleman's control, as he would lose all of his credibility and much of his support.

--Montealegre must gain more support from independents and solidify the support he enjoys from this sector thus far. He must also be more decisive vis a vis the CENIs (debt bonds to shore up bank failures in 2000) issue.

--It remains uncertain whether Jarquin will be able to whittle away enough points from Ortega to prevent an Ortega victory on the first round.

-- Low voter turnout will favor Ortega; high turnout is more likely to favor the anti-Sandinista vote, and the anti-caudillo vote more generally.

--Vigorous international monitoring is crucial to minimizing fraud and ensuring Nicaraguans their votes will count before and during election day.

RISKS AND SETBACKS

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14. (C) Among the risks and possible setbacks of a five-way race:

-Voter fraud could be easier to commit and more

prevalent due to non-traditional circumstances (the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) remains in the hands of the "pacted" FSLN and PLC, with the FSLN enjoying the upper hand, while other parties currently have no representation).

-One or both of the dissident candidates could fail to develop an organization capable of transforming popular support into sufficient votes and defending the vote against fraud perpetrated by the majority parties; or,

-Jarquin and Rizo could draw enough votes from Montealegre to allow Ortega to win on the first round.

POLLS - WHAT MORE WE NEED TO KNOW

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¶5. (SBU) Although the polls tell us much, gaps remain in the information available, specifically in the following areas:

-Which candidate respondents believe is best poised to beat Ortega.

-A clearer picture of the inclinations of independent voters.

-regional preferences to improve message targeting.

-impact, if any, of U.S. on voter choice in urban, semi-urban, and rural areas.

Focus groups would help clarify these points.

NEXT STEPS

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¶6. (S) Efforts thus far to sideline Aleman, reform the PLC, and reunite the PLC and ALN have failed, and at this juncture are probably counterproductive. Montealegre's rejoining the PLC would not guarantee a PLC victory, as the votes of many current Montealegre supporters would migrate elsewhere. Further, if Rizo withdrew and actively campaigned for Montealegre, the ALN could lose more votes from the independents than it would gain from Rizo's support. The ideal scenario to avoid a possible (but not yet probable) first-round Ortega win would be Rizo's resignation and his

withdrawal from the political scene. Accomplishing this objective will require robust persuasion/dissuasion from Embassy and Washington -- and in the end, our pressure might not be enough.

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